(a) whether the Ministry of Food has demanded a cut in import duty for pulses to boost imports to meet drought induced shortage; and

(b) if so, the action taken to bring down consumer prices for "dal" the common man's food?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND COMPANY AFFAIRS (SHRI GINGEE N. RAMACHANDRAN): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Government has taken a number of measures under Technology Mission on Oilseeds and Pulses (TMOP) to increase the production and productivity of pulses in the country. Imports of pulses are allowed at lower rate (10%) of duty for augmenting its availability at reasonable prices. Imports have helped in maintaining the prices of different varieties of pulses in the country. In view of the above no change in import duty is contemplated for the present.

Reduction of retirement age

691. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Will the Minister of FINANCE AND COMPANY AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Central Government are seriously considering reducing the retirement age of the Central Government employees from 60 years to 58 years;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the issue has been discussed at the recently held Chief Minister's conference; and

(d) if so, what is the outcome of the meeting?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND COMPANY AFFAIRS (SHRI ANANDRAO VITHOBA ADSUL): (a) and (b) No proposal is under consideration to reduce the age of retirement of Central Government employees from 60 to 58 years.

(c) and (d) No, Sir.

Early alert system for sub-standard accounts

692. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Will the Minister of FINANCE AND COMPANY AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the RBI to prevent slippages of substandard accounts into default category prposed "Early Alert System" and "Special Mention Account";

(b) if so, the details of the proposed system; and

(c) in what manner Government propose to reduce NPAs which now stands to the tune of Rs. one lakh crores?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND COMPANY AFFAIRS (SHRI ANANDRAO VITHOBA ADSUL): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has circulated guidelines to all commercial banks for prevention of slippage of non-performing assets (NPAs) accounts from "sub-standard" category to "doubtful/loss" category, which include suggestions on "Early Alert System" and "Special Mention Accounts". The "Early Alert System" envisages that the banks put in place a system that captures early warning signals in respect of accounts showing first signs of weakness so that timely and adequate interventions can be made to reverse the position. Under this system a new asset category once the earliest signs of sickness/irregularities are noticed. Accounts classified under this category would not be treated as NPAs and would not require provisioning.

(c) Government of India and RBI have advised the Banks and Financial Institutions to take several steps for recovery of dues such as evolving and the implementation of recovery policy by banks, compromise settlement through Settlement Advisory Committees and filing of suits in Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRTs). Banks have also been advised to use the forum of Lok Adalat for compromise settlements. RBI in July, 2002 and also introduced non-discretionary and non-discriminatory One Time Settlement Scheme for NPAs upto Rs. 5 crore.

Credit Information Bureau has been set up to disseminate information on borrowers to the Banks. Corporate Debt Restructuring (CDR) scheme has been put in place to provide a transparent mechanism for restructuring of corporate debts to viable entities facing problems due to internal and external factors. Further, to facilitate foreclosures and enforcement of securities in cases of default and to enable the banks and financial institutions to realize their dues, "The Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Ordinance, 2002" has been promulgated, and its replacement Bill has been passed by the Lok Sabha on 21st November, 2002.